

Kenneth Kreitner. *The Church Music of Fifteenth-Century Spain*.

Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music 2. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004. xiv + 182 pp. index. append. illus. tbls. bibl. \$80. ISBN: 1-84383-075-2.

Narratives of Spanish music of the Renaissance usually start with the court of Isabella and Ferdinand at the end of the fifteenth century — mentioning *villancicos* by Encina and sacred works by Anchieta — but move quickly into the sixteenth century with Peñalosa, to concentrate the discussion on later contributions by vihuelists, such as Milán or Narváez, and the three great polyphonists Morales, Guerrero, and Victoria. However, music in the kingdoms of Spain during the fifteenth century is basically unknown, with the exception of Aragonese Naples. Even though many singers and instrumentalists are known to have been active at that time in Aragon, Castile, or Navarre, the scarcity and late date of fifteenth-century polyphonic sources has made it very difficult to talk about the repertoire that may have been composed and performed in the Iberian Peninsula prior to the Catholic Monarchs. The three main sources of Iberian polyphony from that period (“Cancionero de la Colombina,” “Cancionero de Palacio,” and Segovia manuscript) were compiled during and after the 1490s, and although David Fallows has identified in those manuscripts alone sixty-one Spanish secular pieces that probably predate 1480, nothing similar has been done for Spanish sacred repertoire until now. Thus, Kreitner’s book is a particularly important contribution, since he focuses on an obscure period of the history of Spanish music, identifying and commenting upon a corpus of sixty-seven Latin sacred works carefully selected from extant sources. Moreover, his detailed analysis — using plain and easy language — enables him to construct a “story” of musical development in fifteenth-century Spain “with the growth, over the last decades of the century, of an increasingly complex and sophisticated rhythmic organization for sacred music” (156).

Kreitner’s book is divided into ten chapters, mostly devoted to music sources and three main composers (Cornago and Urrede, in chapter 5, and Anchieta, in chapter 7). The first chapter (“Eleven Days”) opens with a description of the ceremonies with music performed on Christmas Eve 1478 in the presence of Juan II of Aragón (Ferdinand’s father) and then a few days later during his obsequies from 20 January to 30 January 1479. These descriptions serve the author as an introduction to ask himself what kind of repertoire could have been performed on those occasions, and to explain to the reader the difficult task of identifying early repertoire of Spanish church polyphony, most of which “was meant to substitute monophonic chant” (6). Kreitner affirms that, although at the time Spain remained part of the musical periphery, compared to Franco-Flemish territories and Italy, it will be worth listening to these works. Chapter 2 (“The Catalan *Ars Subtilior*”) is devoted to establishing the musical situation at the turn of the fifteenth century, and the author then proceeds chronologically according to the approximate dates of extant sources (Barcelona 251 and Paris 967 in chapter 3; Colombina and Paris 4379 in chapter 4; Segovia in chapter 6; Barcelona 454 and Tarazona 2/3 in chapters 8 and 9, respectively), discussing problems of chronology

and different aspects of the chosen works (illustrated with numerous musical examples). Each chapter concludes with a useful summary section (“The Story So Far”). Chapter 10 (“Sixty-Seven Pieces”) describes the repertoire, suggesting six “stylistic archetypes”: chant harmonization, chant accompaniment, smoothed-over homophony, full-fledged contrapuntal writing, slow imitation, and mixed style. The appendix lists the sixty-seven pieces of Latin sacred polyphony and their sources grouped by genres, indicating attributions: anonymous (36), Alba (1), Anchieta (9), Anchieta/Peñalosa/Ribera/Compère (1), Binchois/anon. (1), Escobar (1), Illario (1), Madrid (3 + 1?), Marturià (1), Mondéjar/Díaz (1), Sanabria (2 + 1?), Segovia (1), Triana (3), and Urrede (4). This book has the virtue of placing under the spotlight a modest repertoire by predecessors of the Spanish composers of the Golden Age, a kind of music that — in contrast with the most sophisticated pieces by famous composers of the time — illustrates what may have been common polyphonic practice in many European churches. In this respect, Kreitner’s book fills a gap in the classic study by Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music, 1380–1500*.

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